Reduction in H-1B visas by U.S.A.

*46. SHRI RAMA MUNI REDDY SIRIGIREDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that U.S.A. has decided to reduce H-1B visas much less than the proposed number of 65,000;

(b) whether it is also a fact that the U.S. Administration is seriously thinking of reducing even the L-1S used to transfer of staff from one office to another;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) the reasons behind this step and the action that has been contemplated by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) to (d) In response to an increase in demand for skilled information technology professionals in the United States, the United States Congress had, through the American competitiveness and Workforce Improvement Act of 1998, progressively increased the H-1B visa quota between U.S. fiscal years 1999 and 2003. According to that Act, the annual quota was to revert from 195,000 in U.S. fiscal year 2003 to the original level of 65,000 from U.S. fiscal year 2004. Since the United States Congress has so far taken no legislative measure the quota, the annual ceiling on H-1B visas now stands at 65,000.

There is no ceiling under U.S. law on the number of L-1 visas. Government is not aware of any initiatives by the United States Administration to regulate access of foreign information technology firms or professionals to the United States. There are, however, a number of legislative proposals in the United States Congress and the Congress of some States in the United States to restrict, and regulate conditions for, access of foreign firms and professionals to the United States information technology market, including outsourcing of Government-funded projects. None of these proposals have become law so far.

Government has seen reports that ascribe such legislative initiatives in the United States to economic factors, such as impact on employment opportunities for U.S. citizens and permanent residents.

Government does not wish to comment on the sovereign right of the legislature of another country to determine the laws of that country. However, Government is working with all concerned to emphasise the mutual interest of India and the United States in unrestricted growth of India-U.S. ties in the information technology industry.

Expansion and upgradation of I.T.

*47. SHRI HARISH RAWAT: Will . the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) the details of the steps to be taken for the expansion and up-gradation of the Information Technology in all the States of the country equally;

(b) whether Government propose to provide special assistance to bring forward the under developed States in the said field; and

(c) if so, the details of proposals accepted for the year 2003-04 and 2004-05 alongwith the locations thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ARUN SHOURIE): (a) The measures taken by the Government for expansion and upgradation of Information Technology (IT) across the country include:

provision of IT and datacom infrastruture through National Informatics Centre (NIC), Education and Research Network of India (ERNET) and Software Technology Parks of India (STPI);

- fiscal incentives in the form of tax rebates and duty concessions for investments in software and hardware manufacture and exports;
- nurturing centres of excellence in science and technology and supporting higher education and R&D efforts in related fields; and
- supplementing IT manpower with non-formal IT education through accreditation of courses, curriculum design and conduct of examinations for different levels of proficiency.

The Department of Information Technology (DIT) has also established